Good or Evil: The Cleveland Museum of Art Presents Demons, Ghosts, and Goblins in Chinese Art

Thursday September 5, 2024

Tomb Guardians, early 700s. China, probably Shaanxi province, Xi'an, Tang dynasty (618-907).

Download the Press Kit

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Exhibition explores Chinese art featuring demonic creatures as entities that either bring harm or ward off evil spirits.

CLEVELAND (September 5, 2024)—Featuring paintings and sculptures of secular and religious subject matter from the CMA and an important private collection, *Demons, Ghosts, and Goblins in Chinese Art* explores the stories in which these creatures appear and the supernatural power that they exert. This exhibition presents three

sculptures of fearsome guardian figures and more than a dozen Chinese paintings depicting demons and monsters in their role of either causing havoc on earth or acting as protectors against evil forces and harmful intruders. This free exhibition is on view September 8, 2024, through January 20, 2025, in the Julia and Larry Pollock Focus Gallery.

“Supernatural spirits exist in many cultures and civilizations,” said Clarissa von Spee, James and Donna Reid Curator of Chinese Art and Interim Curator of Islamic Art, Chair of Asian Art. “In China, demons and monsters exist in the Buddhist, Daoist, and Confucian worlds. Historic figures from these belief systems, such as Shakyamuni Buddha or the demon queller Zhong Kui, exert control and governance over demons and monsters, imposing order over chaos.”

The works of art on display include scrolls, earthenware, sculptures, and inks on paper that explore different contexts in which demons and monsters can be represented, both positive and negative.

One highlight is a pair of large tomb guardian figures moved from the Clara T. Rankin Chinese Art Galleries (239) into the exhibition space. Also on view is a handscroll from a private collection that, fully unrolled, is over 32 feet long. Paintings of the theme “Searching for Demons in Mount Guankou” are rarely seen and only a dozen are known to exist. Ten album leaves from the museum’s collection illustrating aspects of the same story are displayed alongside the scroll.

Monsters and supernatural spirits are often pictorialized in the context of festivals. Also featured is a finger painting of popular demon queller Zhong Kui that depicts him with an ugly face and disheveled beard, an appearance that was intended to scare evil spirits away. The figure’s ugliness is enhanced by the scratches, blotches, and ink dots achieved with the artist’s split nails, fingertips, and palm in place of a brush. Legends describe Zhong Kui as an unrecognized scholarly talent who once appeared in a dream of Tang emperor Xuanzong (reigned 712–56) to kill a harassing demon. Relieved of the demon, the emperor had Zhong Kui’s image painted after his dream, which became the model for all later depictions of the demon queller. In popular belief, Zhong Kui is a powerful guard against evil spirits, particularly on New Year’s Day and at the Double Fifth Festival, on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month, when his image is hung in households to ward off diseases and other misfortunes.

Complimentary Programming

Play Day: Otherworld

Sunday, October 13, 2024, 10:00 a.m.–2:00 p.m.
Ames Family Atrium
Free

Play Days at the CMA are free opportunities for families to be creative and curious and connect through art together. Events include music, storybook readings, games, and art making for the whole family. Each event has a theme that relates to an exhibition, artist, or artworks in the CMA's collection.

Witness wonder and celebrate diverse cultures and their enchanting folklore. Discover how demons and monsters are revered around the world, including the unique role they play in Chinese tradition through mesmerizing performances, a community scroll, music, and more!

Artist in the Atrium: Spooky Sketches

Saturday, October 19, 2024, 11:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m.

Ames Family Atrium

Free

Every third Saturday of each month, stop by the Ames Family Atrium between 11:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. to get a firsthand look at the art-making process. Each session provides the opportunity to engage and interact with a different Northeast Ohio maker during pop-up demonstrations and activities. See their work unfold and learn how artists create. Explore a related selection of authentic objects from the CMA's Education Art Collection in a pop-up Art Up Close session. See, think, and wonder.

This month, join us for an immersive experience with illustrator and multimedia artist Angela Joy Oster. Angela's work delves into narrative, humor, and character-driven visions, exploring themes of human frailty and the quest for immortality with a touch of whimsy.

In this program, Angela leads a collaborative drawing session, inviting visitors to contribute their own interpretations of supernatural beings inspired by the exhibition *Demons, Ghosts, and Goblins in Chinese Art*. Dive into Angela's imaginative world and unleash your creativity as you add your personal touch to this enchanting group drawing.

Don't miss this unique opportunity to engage with Angela's thought-provoking art and participate in a collaborative art-making process that bridges cultures and inspires originality.

Demons, Ghosts, and Goblins in Chinese Art with Clarissa von Spee, James and Donna Reid Curator of Chinese Art, and Ika Yi-Hsia Hsiao, Conservator of Asian Paintings
Wednesday, November 20, 2024, 6:00–9:00 p.m.
John C. and Sally S. Morley Family Foundation Lecture Hall
Free; Reservation Required

Demons, ghosts, and goblins appear in Chinese art as creatures that either bring harm or ward off evil spirits. Explore this fascinating exhibition with its curator, Clarissa von Spee, and learn of the conservation efforts that took place to facilitate the show. This program is followed by a reception. For this event, Asian Art Society members are joined by supporters of the CMA Fund for Conservation and Column & Stripe.

Chamber Music in the Atrium: Musical Upcoming Stars in the Classics
Wednesday, October 23, 2024, 7:00–8:00 p.m.
Ames Family Atrium
Free

The museum's popular Chamber Music in the Atrium concert series continues with a special Halloween edition. Showcasing outstanding young musicians from Musical Upcoming Stars in the Classics, this evening's concert titled "An Enchanted Program" features songs with themes to get you excited for the upcoming Halloween season. Selections include the following:

Saint-Saën's "Danse Macabre"
Tartini's "Devil's Trill Sonata"
Bolcom's "Graceful Ghost Rag"
Schubert's "Erlkönig" ("Elf King")
Mendelssohn's "Hexenlied" ("Witches' Song")

MIX: Supernatural
Friday, November 1, 2024, 6:00–10:00 p.m.
Ames Family Atrium
Ticketed

Join us on November 1 at MIX: Supernatural, a Halloween dance party celebrating the opening of the CMA's newest exhibition, *Demons, Ghosts, and Goblins in Chinese Art*. Back

by popular demand, DJ Fabrizio spins an all-night set mixing his signature international dance music with selections that acknowledge the Halloween spirit. Spooky themed food and drink items, including cocktails, beer, and wine, are available to purchase from Bon Appétit. Have a wicked good time at this evening's extravaganza.

Disclaimer: No full-face masks, heavy face paint, glitter, weaponlike props, or excessively oversize costumes are permitted. All outfits are subject to security screening. The Cleveland Museum of Art may refuse entry to any visitor whose attire does not comply with these requirements.

Open Studio at the CAC
Saturdays and Sundays in November 2024, 1:00–4:00 p.m.
Community Arts Center
Free; No Reservation Required

Enjoy free, drop-in art making. A monthly theme connects community, art, and exploration. Join us during the month of November and learn about *Demons, Ghosts, and Goblins in Chinese Art.* From beginners to experienced artists, everyone can enjoy hands-on activities that bring the legends of demons and guardians to life. Enjoy fun and imaginative experience where you can explore art's powerful role in storytelling and protection.

This exhibition is made possible with support from Anne T. and Donald F. Palmer.

All exhibitions at the Cleveland Museum of Art are underwritten by the CMA Fund for Exhibitions. Principal annual support is provided by Michael Frank and the late Pat Snyder, the Kelvin and Eleanor Smith Foundation, the John and Jeanette Walton Exhibition Fund, and Margaret and Loyal Wilson. Major annual support is provided by the late Dick Blum and Harriet Warm and the Frankino-Dodero Family Fund for Exhibitions Endowment. Generous annual support is provided by two anonymous donors, Gini and Randy Barbato, Gary and Katy Brahler, Cynthia and Dale Brogan, Dr. Ben and Julia Brouhard, Brenda and Marshall Brown, Gail and Bill Calfee, Joseph and Susan Corsaro, Richard and Dian Disantis, the Jeffery Wallace Ellis Trust in memory of Lloyd H. Ellis Jr., Leigh and Andy Fabens, Florence Kahane Goodman, Janice Hammond and Edward Hemmelgarn, Robin Heiser, the late Marta and the late Donald M. Jack Jr., Eva and Rudolf Linnebach, the William S. Lipscomb Fund, Bill and Joyce Litzler, the Roy Minoff Family Fund, Lu Anne and the late Carl Morrison, Jeffrey Mostade and Eric Nilson and Varun Shetty, Tim O'Brien and Breck Platner, William J. and Katherine T. O'Neill, Henry Ott-Hansen, Michael and Cindy Resch, William Roj and

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About the Cleveland Museum of Art

The Cleveland Museum of Art (CMA) is renowned for the quality and breadth of its collection, which includes more than 63,000 artworks and spans 6,000 years of achievement in the arts. The museum is a significant international forum for exhibitions, scholarship and performing arts and is a leader in digital innovation. One of the leading encyclopedic art museums in the United States, the CMA is recognized for its award-winning open access program—which provides free digital access to images and information about works in the museum's collection—and free of charge to all. The museum is located in the University Circle neighborhood with two satellite locations on Cleveland's west side: the Community Arts Center and Transformer Station.

The museum is supported in part by residents of Cuyahoga County through a public grant from Cuyahoga Arts & Culture and made possible in part by the Ohio Arts Council (OAC), which receives support from the State of Ohio and the National Endowment for the Arts. The OAC is a state agency that funds and supports quality arts experiences to strengthen Ohio communities culturally, educationally, and economically. For more information about the museum and its holdings, programs, and events, call 888-CMA-0033 or visit cma.org.